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ABSTRACT

This handbook, issued in conjunction with the Governor's "Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools," provides recommendations for revising promotion policies and practices in Pennsylvania schools. After a brief introduction, the results of a survey of promotion and retention practices are presented in summary form, followed by another brief summary of promotion/retention research studies. The main body of the handbook consists first of guidelines for developing or revising promotion/retention policies and procedures. These cover legal bases for policy, philosophy and goal, general promotion policy, developing criteria for retaining students, factors in the promotion/retention decision, alternatives to retention, who makes the promotion decision, and policy adoption and implementation. The next section provides descriptions of some promising practices, including early identification of problems, ungraded programs, home-school communication, mastery learning, tutoring, higher standards, and remedial/alternative programs. The handbook concludes with a checklist for policy development, and two appendixes provide sample forms and a review of the literature on social promotion and retention. (TE)

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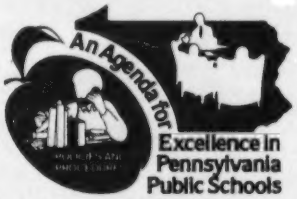

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I. INTRODUCTION

Standards for student promotion have become a major concern in recent years as parents, educators and citizens have found that large numbers of students and graduates are unable to perform functional basic skills. The movements toward minimum competency testing, back to basics and higher academic standards grew out of this concern. More recently still, numerous prestigious national reports have advocated abolishing social promotion. Some of the recommendations are:

- Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

- Promotion from grade to grade should be based on mastery, not age (Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983).

- Every state should establish rigorous standards for high school graduation, and local school districts should provide rigorous standards for grade promotion. We should curtail the process of social promotion (National Science Board, 1983).

- Promotion from grade to grade based on examinations and not on "social" promotion is favored by a substantial majority (75%) of survey respondents. This view is shared by parents of school children and by those who have no children in school (Gallup, 1983, p. 38).

Pennsylvania has been moving toward the improvement of education too, and in 1983 Governor Dick Thornburgh, in introducing his Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools, emphasized that "we must move quickly to adopt and enforce tough new standards relating to what is being taught in Pennsylvania schools, how well it is being taught by Pennsylvania teachers and how well it is being learned by Pennsylvania students". Therefore, the purpose of this handbook is to:

- present the results of a survey of promotion policies and practices in Pennsylvania schools.

- present a review of the literature on promotion and retention.

- provide guidelines for developing or revising promotion/retention policies and procedures.

- describe some promising practices related to promotion and retention.

- suggest a checklist for use in policy development.

II. A SUMMARY OF PROMOTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS

In the summer of 1984 the Pennsylvania Department of Education conducted a survey of promotion policies and practices in the state's public schools in response to a request for information from the State Board of Education (Bellew, 1984). A total of 423 districts, or 84.4 percent of the state's 501 school districts, had returned usable responses. The major findings of the survey included:

- All of the 423 districts retained some students in 1983-84.
- A total of 67,958 students were retained by the 422 districts which reported retention data. This was 4.71 percent of the students enrolled in these districts.
- The average retention rate was 161 students per district.
- The lowest number of students retained in any one district was four and the highest number was 29,396.
- The lowest percentage of students retained was .36; the highest was 17.01.
- The greatest percentage of students are retained in the first grade, where research has shown retention to be the most effective academically and the least damaging socially.
- Students are retained more than one time if necessary.
- Retention rate is growing in some districts due to increase of standards, expectations and graduation requirements.
- Retention is decreasing in some districts due to the use of remedial programs, efforts to alert parents about potential retentions and the use of appropriate instructional strategies.
- Most Pennsylvania school districts have a written administrative policy and/or guidelines on promotion/retention.
- Most districts do not appear to have a board adopted policy on promotion/retention.
- Most districts seem to practice something between merit and social promotion. Philosophically, they believe in continuous progress, but realize that in some cases retention is in the child's best interest.
- Pennsylvania schools have incorporated a number of special programs related to promotion/retention, such as transitional first grades and ungraded programs.
- The criteria for retention vary by grade level. In high school the criterion is usually the number of credits accumulated. In junior high retention is usually based on the number of subjects passed. At the elementary level, academic achievement and grades are the primary concern. However, professional judgment of what is in a child's best interest is considered, and factors such as age, ability, physical maturity, emotional and social maturity, parental and student attitude, attendance, previous retentions and the chance for success at the next grade level may be included in the decision.
- Most districts do not have a policy on the number of times a student can be retained. However, 38 percent of the districts in the survey did. Some typical practices are "No more than three retentions K-12," and "We normally do not retain for a second time in a grade."

- The majority of the districts do allow promotion regardless of academic achievement if it is felt to be in the child's best interest. Some examples include special education students and students who are extremely over age. This practice is frequently referred to as transfer/placement, assignment, or administrative promotion to distinguish it from advancement based on academic achievement, and it is so recorded in the student's record.
- Most districts stress early identification of problems and communication with the parents in an attempt to correct student deficiencies before the end of the year.
- Many Pennsylvania school districts have been or will be tightening their district promotion and retention policies and standards.

III. SUMMARY OF PROMOTION/RETENTION RESEARCH STUDIES

Building excellence into the schools of our nation has been the theme of many national and regional reports in the past two years. Among the panaceas suggested for achieving school improvement is a strict promotion-by-merit policy. The cry is, "No more social promotion!"

A search of the educational research literature has not supported the view, implied in these recent recommendations, that retention of pupils in grade will lead to more achievement. The major findings of the literature review included:

- The research clearly shows that simple retention in grade with no alteration of treatment is not the appropriate response to poor academic achievement.
- There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic difficulties.
- Special remedial plans, an individual educational plan for each student, and concurrence of parents with the decision to retain can improve the chances that nonpromotion will result in improved academic performance.
- The promotion/retention decision should be an individual matter for each child, and should include consideration of child factors, such as age and maturity, school and family factors in addition to academic achievement.
- Remediation, alternate instructional materials, partial promotion to a half-step grade or ungraded schools are possible aids to success for the low-achieving student.

These conclusions from the literature seem indefinite and unclear. A more detailed review which appears in Appendix B reports that most research studies are extremely limited or methodologically flawed. Therefore, only indications of truth can be gleaned from them and generalization to all children in all schools is not appropriate. The most useful ideas from the literature may be the suggested alternate treatments for failing students and suggested factors for consideration in the decision to pass or fail.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Legal Bases for Policy

A policy is a principle expressing commitment to a goal; it encompasses the philosophical bases for that goal. The policy provides a framework for the development of regulations and procedures which define the actions by which the policy will be implemented.

All school policies must be framed in compliance with Pennsylvania laws, the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, and the general laws and constitutions of the state and the nation. In the case of promotion and retention policy, the laws give little guidance. Therefore, developers of promotion policies and guidelines must take into consideration information from research, successful policies and practices in use in similar districts, and attitudes of school staff, parents and students in order to achieve the most appropriate and effective result.

Two relevant laws are Section 1531 of the Public School Code and Section 5.11 of the State Board of Education Curriculum Regulations. The Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, in Section 1531 concerning grading, classification and promotion of pupils, states:

> Teachers in public schools shall, under the direction of the proper superintendents of schools, grade and classify the pupils in their schools so that they may pursue the courses of study herein provided for, and all pupils found proficient may be promoted twice each year.

Chapter 5 of the State Board of Education Regulations states similarly:

> Credit shall be awarded upon satisfactory completion of planned courses as shall be determined by the principal in consultation with the teacher.

In practice, the principal and teacher are usually more actively involved in a final decision, as stated in the laws above, while the superintendent remains involved on a district policy level but seldom participates in individual promotion decisions.

Who should be involved in the development of promotion/retention policies and guidelines? Because promotion or non-promotion is a professional decision which can influence all areas of a child's life, the policy development team should include the local school board, administration, pupil personnel staff and classroom teachers. Such a representative professional group can consider all facets of the problem in developing a philosophy on which school staff can base promotion/retention decisions as well as the procedure to be followed and factors which will influence the decision.

Philosophy and Goal

What does the school believe about promotion and retention?

The majority of Pennsylvania school district policies which were received by the Department of Education as part of the 1984 survey contained guidelines and procedures, but no philosophical basis or goal for the policy. These policies assumed that the goal was to make the correct educational decision for the pupil.

Among the minority who stated their philosophical purpose for a promotion/retention policy, the following statements are typical.

- The guiding philosophy will be what is best for the child.
- This policy is intended to promote the concept of success in learning.
- Every decision regarding the assignment of a child should be based on a consensus of all concerned with the well-being of the child.
- The Board believes that all children are different and that each child grows at his own rate, in accordance with his ability, environment, and past experience. The Board believes that all children cannot meet the same grade standards. The Board feels, therefore, that promotion standards must be planned to permit flexibility for individual differences and to provide for the maximum yearly growth of each child.
- The program of promotion/retention is based on the premise that all students have diverse capabilities and interests as well as individual patterns of growth and learning. Therefore, any promotion/retention procedures must consider the student as an individual and in proper relationship with other students.
- The basic criterion for promotion is the probability that the child will succeed in the next higher grade. Where there is a conflict of judgment or facts do not clearly dictate the course to follow, the pupil will receive the benefit of the doubt.
- Our focus will be to devise a policy that minimizes retention and seeks to emphasize special arrangements or help for the few who are to be retained. In this way, we can begin to provide continuous progress and success for each student.
- The goal of the school is to develop each student to the maximum extent possible. Students will be placed at the instructional level where they can attain their greatest achievement.
- Because the schools are dedicated to the development of each pupil enrolled, the administration and the professional staff is expected to place pupils at the grade level best suited to them academically, socially, and emotionally.

- When a student fails and is compelled to repeat a grade or subject, it is costly to both the student and society. The child who fails learns to dread school and to react against it in whatever way is open. Such children not only fail to make progress, but they often prevent others from doing so and cause distraction and disruption of the instructional program. The school district promotion policy is designed not to eliminate retention in grade but to establish guidelines for dealing with children who need additional time or help to master the objectives of each educational level.

- The Board recognizes that the personal, social, physical and educational growth of children will vary and that they should be placed in the educational setting most appropriate to their needs at the various stages of their growth.

These statements reflect the readiness of most school districts to accept both retention and promotion as acceptable practices, depending on the apparent needs of each child. None of these stated philosophies precludes retention where it seems best for the child; but they all allow, under certain conditions, for promotion where academic achievement is below that required for merit promotion. However, stating the philosophy or goal of the school policy provides a criterion against which details of the policy and even individual promotion/retention decisions can be measured.

In writing the school philosophy on which to base promotion/retention policy, any wording which clearly explains the combined position of school district faculty, staff and board members is acceptable. Two cautions must be observed: the philosophy must be broad enough to suggest the appropriate lines of action for meeting a variety of problems, and it must be narrow enough to give clear guidance for the direction this action should take.

General Promotion Policy

The basic expectation of the school system is that pupils should be able to satisfactorily complete the work of each grade within the time allowed. Then, on the basis of their progress, they shall be promoted each year to the next higher grade or level. The Public School Code provides that pupils found proficient may be promoted; the State Board of Education regulation requires credit to be awarded upon "satisfactory completion" of the year's work.

For the majority of our children and youth, this system works well; for the unhappy minority, however, there are many problems. Perhaps it could be said that the policy on promoting the children who pass their courses is rather simple and clearcut. It is easy to state and implement. Teachers will do their best to meet the needs of individual students; as a result the students will meet the criteria for a passing grade in their course work; at the end of the school year, most of the students will be found proficient and will progress to the next grade.

A school promotion policy should explain clearly the criteria for promotion, how promotion or retention decisions will be made in cases where some of the criteria are not met, and who will be involved in the decision-making process.

If teacher evaluations of student achievement, as expressed in grades, are the only criteria for promotion, this should be stated in the policy. If passing of final examinations, standardized achievement tests, or other objective measures constitute the only bases for promotion, this should be stated. If the district uses multiple criteria such as grades, tests scores, attendance, teacher judgment and general deportment, this should appear in the policy statement. Whatever constitutes the school's standard operating procedures for moving pupils from one grade or level to another should be stated as the general promotion policy of the school or district.

A general promotion policy, which is used in a number of districts with minor changes in wording or provisions, follows.

> It shall be the policy of the Board of School Directors of this district that each child shall be moved forward in a continuous pattern of achievement and growth that is in harmony with his/her own development.
>
> Such patterns coincide with the system of grade levels established by this board and the instructional objectives established for each.
>
> A student will be promoted to the succeeding grade level when she/he has:
>
> 1. Completed the course requirements of the presently assigned grade.
>
> 2. In the opinion of her/his teachers, achieved the instructional objectives set for the present grade.
>
> 3. Demonstrated proficiency to move ahead to the educational program of the next level.
>
> 4. Demonstrated the degree of social, emotional and physical maturation necessary for a successful learning experience at the next learning level.

In contrast, a short general policy for an elementary school says:

> A pupil who finishes the year at this elementary school and has shown satisfactory progress for the year shall be promoted to the following grade.

The statement of the same district concerning junior high school details the number of major and minor course failures which preclude promotion. This is true for many middle/junior high schools. Such policies usually consider failure of two major courses or one major and some number of minor courses as sufficient evidence for not promoting the student to the next higher grade.

In almost every district, promotion in the senior high school depends on the number of credits earned. The exact number required for assignment to sophomore, junior or senior class standing within a district should be defined.

Some districts assume normal progression until it is obvious that a student cannot possibly earn enough credits in one year to graduate, and when this student is identified, she/he is not considered a senior. Others include a list of minimum numbers of credits for promotion each year, with the actual numbers depending on district graduation requirements.

The new graduation reqirements stated in the State Board of Education Curriculum Regulations will require changes in the districts which have previously been listing the old minimum requirements. Other districts are already at or above the new minimum of 21 credits in grades 9 through 12; they need not change. The minimum of 21 will require a total of 5 or 6 credits for sophomore status, 10 or 11 credits for junior status, and 15 or 16 credits for senior standing. In addition to stating credits needed for promotion, schools add the requirement that courses such as English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies and Physical Education must be passed each year.

In summary, then, most Pennsylvania schools have either a stated or unstated but assumed policy that students will be promoted from grade to grade on the basis of academic achievement. The judgment about the adequacy of each student's achievement is made on the basis of one or more of the following: end-of-term grade average, performance on teacher-made tests, and results from standardized achievement tests or competency measures.

Developing Criteria for Retaining Students

In most school districts the expectation that students will achieve enough each year to earn promotion is true of the majority of the school population. It is the non-achieving or low-achieving minority who need special consideration. In most district promotion policies, the problems of non-promotion occupy the largest space by far. Perhaps the simplest possible statement is that "retention takes place when teacher recommends and standardized tests and classroom evaluations document lack of expected achievement level" (for elementary students). Similarly, secondary students "must pass 70 percent of scheduled credits to be promoted."

Policies concerning possible retentions may include:

- suggestions for preventing failure
- forms and procedures for early communication with parents and suggestions for cooperative efforts to improve the student's learning and grades
- factors concerning home, school and child to be considered in the retention decision
- delineation of alternatives such as tutoring or summer school to erase a failure and avoid retention
- a suggested list of persons to be part of the decision-making or child study team and a statement of who has the final word.

Many district policies will not include all of these facets. Some will attach additional suggestions or ideas for alternative actions, and may limit the number of permissible retentions during a student's school career.

Suggestions for preventing failure are not specific in school policies as a rule, because the policy is indeed a general guideline. One such statement says, "Every effort should be made to provide remediation prior to a decision to retain a student."

Early communication with the parents is the one specific action most often recommended when the pupil appears to be achieving below grade level and retention seems likely. A selection of these statements follows:

- Retention should not come as a surprise to parents and child. The parents should be aware of the fact that the child is having difficulty as early as October.

- By January, teachers inform the Child Study Team about students who are experiencing academic/social problems. After the Team discusses these students, the teacher and principal discuss the student with the parents.

- Prior to the mid-year progress report, a written notice must be sent home indicating that problems exist and a conference must be held. At the conference, parents will be apprised of the specific problems and the steps the school and home should be taking to remediate those problems.

- A deficiency report shall be mailed to parents at the mid-point of each marking period for every child who is doing failing work in any major subject. The deficiency report shall include a request for a parental conference to discuss the child's lack of achievement or possible retention.

- During the fall semester, classroom teachers should be alert to any student who is experiencing learning problems. Parents, counselors and principals should be notified in writing and written plans made for remediation, if required.

These examples show that, in some Pennsylvania school districts, efforts to communicate with parents and to make available remediation time and plans are part of the promotion/retention policy. More specific efforts mentioned include psychological testing and other assessment by members of the child study team to determine specific causes for the problems of individual children.

Factors in the Promotion/Retention Decision

The factors to be considered in making the promotion/retention decision are well explained in some policies and merely assumed in others. Although each case is a separate individual problem which requires a professional decision, a list of possible influences is helpful to assure the optimal outcome. For example, one policy provides that, after the student receives failing grades in two or more subjects (including reading and/or math) and the teacher recommends non-promotion, the physical, mental, social and emotional maturity, as well as the academic achievement of the individual, is to be carefully weighed. In addition, no child will remain more than two years in a grade.

Prior Retentions

The factor of prior retentions is a common one, included in almost all school policies which discuss retention. These policies vary from the simple statement that a child cannot remain more than two years in any grade; through policies that there can be no more than one repetition at each level, i.e., primary grades, intermediate grades, middle or junior high school, and senior high; to the even stricter policies that a student may not be retained more than two times in an entire school career.

A typical statement is, "Retention for more than one year in the elementary grades will be the exception. Retention in the intermediate grades should be rare; however, circumstances may warrant this consideration." A similar policy was stated for a junior-senior high school to the effect that the administration may decide on social promotion for a student who has already repeated a grade. If, in the judgment of the administration, retention would be detrimental to the student, promotion may occur for reasons other than academic performance.

Grade Level

Grade level is an important factor in retention decisions. Almost all policies or statements submitted included the recommendation that where retention seemed necessary, sooner was better. In general, it was stated or accepted that the slow learner's greatest need is for a sound foundation in the basic skills. Therefore, retention for such pupils would be most useful to their development in the first and second grades. For older pupils, however, grade placements may be made on the basis of age in relation to grade level. Even though a pupil has failed two or more major subjects in a junior high grade, he or she may be transferred to or placed in the next grade if the student is considerably older than his or her grade mates. One school requires that students who will be 16 years old the next school term be placed in ninth grade despite subject failures because of the effect on other students. Another district has a similar practice for students who will be 15 years old before September.

Academic Achievement

Various school policies have included many factors in the discussion of what information should be part of the promotion/retention decision. At all levels, academic achievement in major subjects takes precedence over minor subject achievement; in the early grades reading achievement is the most important factor and mathematics runs a close second. But additional factors such as ability, social and emotional awareness, maturity and chronological age are part of the decision. A typical short statement is: Where retention is recommended based on final grades and standardized tests, consideration shall be given to sociological and psychological factors which bear upon the welfare of the child.

Other Factors

The following list of possible factors, which were culled from Pennsylvania school policies, includes some words or phrases which may be duplicate ways of stating a factor. They are included as suggestions for policy builders' use in selecting factors most relevant within a particular school or district.

- Physical Factors

  - Chronological age
  - Physical size
  - Medical history, general health
  - Physical development, speech, coordination
  - Attendance record (and past attendance history)
  - Mental age, level of maturity
  - Ability, IQ, attention span
  - Language barriers

- Social-Emotional Factors

  - Emotional stability, distractibility
  - Social competency, social habits, peer relationships
  - Motivation and adaptation to school
  - Attitude of student toward retention
  - Interest, willingness to take on new learnings
  - General alertness
  - Requirement for constant teacher attention

- Home/Family Factors

  - Family history
  - Home background and environment
  - Attitude of parents toward placement
  - Siblings--ages and grade levels

- Situational Factors

  - Achievement level, test scores, cumulative grades, teacher evaluation
  - Competence in basic skills
  - Daily performance
  - Present grade placement
  - Number of previous retentions, time since last one
  - Psychological report
  - Previous school record
  - Effect on other students

Lawrence Lieberman's promotion/retention decision-making model, as reviewed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL, 1981 pp. 18-19) includes factors in three categories. Many of the items are similar to those listed above from Pennsylvania school districts. Lieberman lists the following factors affecting decisions about promotion or retention:

- Child Factors

  - physical disabilities
  - physical age
  - academic potential
  - psychosocial maturity
  - neurological maturity
  - self-concept

- ability to function independently
- grade placement (when is it appropriate to retain?)
- chronological age
- previous retentions
- nature of the problem (behavior or learning rate as basis for retention)
- sex
- chronic absenteeism
- basic skill competencies
- peer pressure
- child's attitude toward retention

• Family Factors

- geographical moves
- foreign language emigrants
- attitude toward retention (personal history of retention; cultural attitudes; pressure from friends, neighbors and relatives)
- age of siblings and sibling pressure
- involvement of family physicians.

• School Factors

- system's attitude toward retention
- principal's attitude toward retention
- teacher's attitude toward retention
- availability of special education services
- availability of other programmatic options
- availability of personnel.

Decision-Making Instruments

Light's Retention Scale is in use in some districts, and provides a form for observing and scoring factors similar to the ones listed above. This similarity extends to the scoring of the scale--no cut-off point is provided; rather, the scale merely presents a way to get a systematic look at relevant factors. A number of schools have developed their own screening and reporting forms which require assessment of factors to be considered. Several of these forms appear in Appendix A.

In developing school policy, factors for consideration in the promotion decision must be selected. While putting these items into a screening scale was not the usual method among the schools who submitted policies, some formalized scale or system would be useful. Such a form would ensure that critical factors are part of the decision-making process, and a necessarily subjective decision can be given some objectivity. A formal statement of factors to be used in the promotion/retention decision would also help in providing a common decision basis for all staff involved in each case.

Alternatives to Retention

In some districts alternatives are provided for students who cannot earn merit promotion by their academic achievement. These alternatives range from summer school/tutoring to "placing", "transfer" or "assignment" to the next grade. In almost all policies, elementary, middle or junior high and senior high schools are treated separately. The middle and high school generally require some system for "making-up" failed courses. Most elementary schools either pass or fail the student, not in some subjects but for the entire grade. Alternatives to retention fall into three general groups: types of social promotion, course repetition or make-up, and special programs.

Social Promotion Types

When the school decides to "place", "transfer" or "assign" a pupil to the next higher grade despite failing work, this constitutes social promotion, whether the major reason is physical size or age of pupil, previous repetition in grade, a decision that this placement is in the best interest of the child, or a combination of these and other factors. Children may be promoted "on advisement", on a "trial" basis or "conditionally" with the understanding that they may be returned to the previous grade level if the promotion does not work out. Although some school policies discuss the possibility of and conditions for reversing a trial promotion, most district policies assume that once the decision for a nonmerited promotion has been made, the child's placement is settled for the entire school year.

Make-Up Courses

Making-up courses is usually mentioned in connection with secondary school. The elementary teachers are expected to routinely provide for a variety of achievement levels, but a teacher in an eighth grade English class is not expected to teach seventh grade English. The usual methods used for making-up failed courses are an approved summer school, tutoring by an approved tutor, and repeating the course the following school year. Some districts provide a summer school, others will accept credits from neighboring district summer schools, and still others do not encourage this method of gaining credit for failed or incomplete work.

The school policy should specify the conditions under which summer school work is acceptable, who can be an approved tutor and time requirements for tutoring, whether an examination on the course work is required, and any other details which are necessary to define standards for promotion. When course repetition is to be used, the policy must specify the manner in which the make-up course will be scheduled. In the case of developmental content areas, where accomplishment one year builds on understanding of the previous year's work, a proper sequence and timing must be worked out.

Special Programs

In some districts, programs that provide a middle ground which is not strictly promotion or retention have been used. Perhaps the most common of these programs is the transitional first grade for children who have not developed the readiness for first grade work and whose parents agree to placement in the transitional grade. The child is exposed to appropriate

readiness experiences in preparation for the academic and social work of the regular school program, and where possible, moved on into the regular work. At the end of the year with special help, usually in a small class, the child may move to either the regular first grade or second grade, depending on progress made.

Programs which serve other grade levels in a similar program have been tried in a number of districts. A special teacher and educational aide, with help from the school counselor, social worker and volunteers, work to help the non-achieving child by supplying the academic, personal and social support needed to encourage achievement. At the end of a year in this ungraded program, the pupil who has made excellent progress may be ready to rejoin his original cohorts at their grade level. Slow achievers may return to the regular class which is one grade higher than their level before the special program year. Thus, while some participants in the program may be able to avoid an additional year in school, others could receive the extra time and assistance needed to mature and to succeed academically.

Individual Prescriptive Program

Not an alternative to retention, but a recommended practice to accompany it is the use of an individual prescriptive program for students who are considered for nonpromotion. Some schools require that all pupils considered for retention must have an educational prescription from the teacher and other staff making the promotion/retention decision concerning the child's current educational status and the material recommended for the succeeding year. This individually tailored prescription can be of great value whether the child is retained in grade or promoted to the next level. Along with this prescription may be the recommendation that a child retained in grade be assigned to a particular teacher the following year.

Who Makes the Promotion Decision?

There can be no argument about final responsibility for the decision to promote or retain. The School Code and State Board Regulations place it squarely in the province of the administration. Most Pennsylvania school policies place the responsibility on the school principal, who may involve or defer to the district superintendent in controversial cases.

In arriving at the decision, however, prudence and professional ethics dictate the involvement of a number of other staff members. Many schools have promotion/retention teams (Child Study or Multi-Disciplinary Team) composed of the school psychologist, guidance counselor, principal, referring teacher and other staff members who collect the relevant information and decide what seems best for the child in each case. Some policies require parent involvement in the team decision, although parent consent is required only for kindergarten retention. Other schools require only early notification of parents and attempts to cooperate in remediation before the decision is made.

A common practice, rather than prescribing a formal decision team, is that the recommendation for retention would be made by the teacher after consulting with the parents (perhaps), the guidance counselor, and other school personnel.

The principal will give final approval of the retention. The policy and regulations must define what practice will best fit the school or district needs.

Policy Adoption and Implementation

Once a district policy development group has written a policy which includes a philosophy concerning promotion, a general promotion policy, and guidelines for making the promotion/retention decision in cases of low academic achievement, this policy should be approved by the School Board and should include a date for implementation. (The policy writers must be prepared for rewriting and revising if required by the school directors.)

School Board approval is a vital step, but only the first step in policy implementation. When the written document has become official district policy, the administration must use the usual lines of communication to introduce the new policy to faculty and staff, to parents, and to students. If the policy changes any basic customs of the district, such changes should be clearly explained in advance of implementation time to all parts of the school community.

Policy dissemination can help teachers, parents and students to know district requirements and thus prevent problems and disagreements which are fostered by misunderstanding. The implementation date must allow for training staff and teachers in the new regulations, notifying parents of any changes from previous policies, and updating student handbooks to reflect the revised regulations.

V. PROMISING PRACTICES

There are many promising practices dealing with promotion and retention in Pennsylvania schools and other states. Descriptions of some of these practices and programs follow. In the case of nationally validated programs, contact Research and Information Services for Education (RISE), the Pennsylvania state facilitator for the National Diffusion Network, for further information.

Early Identification of Problems

One of the most promising practices regarding promotion/retention is early identification of learning problems. Many Pennsylvania school districts do this by testing children before they enter kindergarten. The school can then take appropriate steps to correct the deficiencies before problems are encountered. Students identified as developmentally young might also be placed in an alternative kindergarten. Such programs typically provide two years of instruction before first grade, with the second year usually being a full day program. Two examples of such programs are Cornwall-Lebanon's Differentiated Kindergarten and Lower Moreland Township's Alternative Kindergarten.

Transitional/alternative/pre-first grades are another way many Pennsylvania school districts provide an extra year of instruction for children before first grade. The programs are for pupils who are not ready for first grade but are too advanced to repeat kindergarten. Generally the students do not have the maturation level or basic skills to do satisfactory first grade work. The program provides an opportunity to concentrate on these areas and provide special attention to the individual student through small classes. Sixty-seven Pennsylvania school districts operated such a program in 1983-84. Most of these programs are full day programs, similar to a regular first grade. In others the student is in a regular kindergarten class for half a day and the transitional class for the other half. Also, some of the programs are funded by ECIA Chapter I. At the end of the transitional first grade, the child normally is promoted to first grade, but may be considered for second grade in cases of exceptional progress.

Ungraded Programs

Ungraded programs allow students to progress at their own rate and eliminate the problems frequently associated with retention. Two variations of ungraded programs in Pennsylvania schools follow.

1. Team Teaching, Tredyffrin-Easttown School District, Berwyn, PA

   The Tredyffrin-Easttown School District has been using a partially ungraded program in its elementary schools for 24 years. Students are assigned to primary (grades 1 and 2), middle (grades 3 and 4) and upper teams (grades 5 and 6). Students are grouped by ability within each team for language arts and math. For homeroom activities, which include science, social studies, art, music and health, students are grouped heterogeneously. Groups are changed throughout the year based on individual progress.

Students normally spend two years assigned to any given team, but may be reassigned for an additional year if, in the judgment of the team and principal, it is in the best interest of the child. The program allows students to progress at their own rate and reportedly has reduced retention in later school years.

2. Readiness/Ungraded Program, Harrisburg School District, Harrisburg, PA

Harrisburg School District initiated a readiness/ungraded program after implementing higher promotion standards and a competency test in 1982. The program provides an intermediate step between all grade levels from first grade through grade 8 for students who have not made "normal" academic progress in the regular classroom but are not recommended for retention. It provides a setting in which the students can experience success and focuses on individualized instruction in reading/language arts and math for 80 percent of each day. This must include 45 minutes of expository and/or creative writing activities each day. Chapter I teachers work with the Readiness/Ungraded class for 90 minutes each day.

Screening for the program is done by the itinerant specialist, reading specialist and possibly the psychologist, but placement must be recommended by a team of three or more staff members including the classroom teacher, ungraded teacher, Chapter I teacher and principal. Students normally remain in the program for a full year, but may be placed in a graded class whenever they demonstrate the ability to function successfully in the class. In addition, students who are weak in reading or math might be assigned to the ungraded program for instruction in that area only.

Home-School Communication

Establishing and maintaining close home-school communication is another important practice regarding promotion and retention. Some of the ways this can be done are by parent conferences, mid-term progress reports, phone calls, and letters. Parents should be informed as soon as possible when their child is having difficulty in school and be told what they can do to help the child at home as well as what the school is doing to remediate the problem. These plans should be written and include specific deficiencies and recommendations to overcome the deficiencies.

Mastery Learning

Mastery learning, a teaching technique that focuses on the use of a corrective/feedback process to improve student learning, is based on the assumption that all students can achieve mastery of what the school has to teach if the learner's previous knowledge and attitudes about the subject are accounted for, if the instruction is of good quality and if adequate time on task is allowed to permit mastery. The six basic components of the mastery learning model are as follows:

- Identification of specific measurable objectives for each learning task.
- Preassessment of the learner's knowledge of the task to be undertaken.
- Instruction

- Diagnostic assessment to determine whether the learner is progressing toward the objectives.
- Prescription for new learning tasks or remediation.
- Postassessment to ascertain whether the skills, concepts and facts identified in the objectives have been achieved.

The mastery learning model employs large group, small group and one-to-one instruction, including peer teaching. In addition, computer assisted instruction, programmed instruction, games and worksheets may be used to help students progress at their own rate. Regardless of the methods used, regular, frequent and specific feedback is given to the learner. Proponents of mastery learning claim that an added investment of 10 to 20 percent over present instructional efforts can result in nearly universal mastery. An example of a mastery learning program follows:

HOSTS Reading: Help One Student to Succeed, HOSTS Corporation, Vancover, WA

HOSTS Reading is a nationally validated remedial reading program for students in grades 2-12. It is a mastery learning program that uses citizen tutors and business participation (30,000 volunteers nationally) plus computer technology to improve student reading achievement. It features a computerized data base involving cross referencing of learning materials, which are indexed to learning objectives. The data base references 750 titles by 50 publishers and was compiled over a period of 11 years by teachers implementing HOSTS. The program is in operation in approximately 300 districts in 20 states. Data from adoption sites attests to average gains of over 14 Normal Curve Equivalencies (NCEs) while in HOSTS Reading programs. HOSTS also has a math program.

Tutoring

A good way to prevent failure among individual students who are having difficulty is to provide tutoring. Teachers and/or advanced students can be used to provide one-on-one instruction. One example of such a program in operation in Pennsylvania schools follows.

Tutoring Program, Fairview High School, Fairview, PA

Fairview High School implemented a tutoring program three years ago in an effort to provide extra help to students who were having trouble in their academic classes. One or more teachers are assigned to tutor in each academic area and are available for tutoring for 40 minutes after the close of each school day. Students can go for tutoring on their own or on the recommendation of their teacher. The tutors meet with each student's regular teacher to find out where help is needed. Tutoring by members of the National Honor Society is also available during study halls.

A number of Pennsylvania school districts also allow students who failed a course to make it up by private tutoring at the students' expense. Such a policy may be useful in small rural areas where summer school is not feasible. Requirements generally include that the tutor be certified in the area being taught and approved by the principal. In addition, a minimum number of hours of instruction is often specified. Other requirements might include that the school determine the course content and provide the test.

Higher Standards

The research on effective schools has shown that schools which have high expectations for students and monitor student progress regularly have higher student achievement. Two examples of such schools follow.

1. Pinellas County School District, Florida

In the fall of 1977 the Pinellas County School District instituted a stringent new policy governing promotions and retentions. The policy, developed over a two-year period by teachers, administrators and parents, had the following objectives:

- No student would be promoted whose interests would be better served by retention.
- Uniform criteria for promotion and retention would be established for all 88 elementary and middle schools in the district.
- To prepare students to do better on the state mandated minimum competency tests.
- To assure students, parents and employers that a high school diploma had meaning and value.

The policy requires a minimum standardized test score for grades 2 through 5 but provides for overruling the standard in individual cases when supported by specific documentation. In addition, 8th grade students are required to demonstrate mastery of at least 70 percent of the standards on the 8th grade state assessment test. Any student who fails to meet this criterion is placed in a compensatory class and retested in the spring.

In the fall each school receives a list of students who scored in the lowest percentile on the standardized tests administered in the spring. Teachers write special instructional plans for these students, parents are informed that their youngsters are potential retainees, and students' progress is closely monitored throughout the year. At the end of the year, these students' tests are scored immediately so that promotion/retention decisions can be made before the schools close.

Two to three times as many students are retained under the new policy but the policy appears to be accepted by the community. In addition, evaluation results indicated that the retention had a positive impact on students' achievement during the year of retention as well as the following year.

2. The Promotional Gates Program, New York City, New York

The Promotional Gates Program was implemented in 1981 for students in grades four and seven who failed to make newly established merit promotion criteria based on the California Achievement Test (CAT). These students are placed in special remedial classes of not more than 15 students which employ the characteristics of exemplary programs and are taught by specially trained teachers.

Students who fail to meet the promotion criteria after one year in the program are placed in a Gates Extension Program in which instruction is vocationally oriented. In addition, the program provides a specially designed six-week summer school program for all students in danger of being retained. However, based on an examination of data from the first four program evaluation reports, Labaree concluded that there was "no evidence that students retained and remedially instructed under the Gates Program made any gains in achievement which they would not have made in the absence of both remediation and retention." (Labaree, 1984)

Remedial/Alternative Programs

In addition to remediation by the regular classroom teacher, students who are having academic difficulty can be placed in special remedial or alternative programs where they can receive intensified, individualized instruction, preferably before they are retained. Class size is usually small so students can receive the extra help they need. The program may operate during the regular school year and/or in the summer. Some examples of such programs follow. Refer to the tenth edition of Educational Programs that Work, the National Diffusion Network, and Education Programs that Work for Students with Low Scores on Pennsylvania's TELLS, Research and Information Services for Education, for additional nationally validated programs.

1. Learning Resource Program, Solanco High School, Quarryville, PA

The Learning Resources Program at the Solanco High School is an experimental program for 9th and 10th grade students who have been identified as slow learners, underachievers and/or potential dropouts.

The students are identified in the 8th and 9th grades by counselors, teachers, and administrators on the basis of their performances, absences, referrals, etc., and recommended for the program. After discussing the program with a staff member, the decision to enter the program is left up to the student and his or her parents. No one is required to be in the L.R.P.

The program is funded by ECIA, Chapter I. The curriculum is a blend of cognitive and affective based strategies and includes the core subjects of reading, mathematics and English. Life skills, such as decision making, goal setting and critical thinking, are also stressed in the L.R.P., while trying to change the negative self-concepts which have developed in previous years. In addition to the basics in reading, English and mathematics, L.R.P. students are given an opportunity to learn about and experience working with the sick and elderly. Evaluation of the program shows significant gains in students post-test scores. In addition, most of the students stay in school and complete their high school education.

2. Counseling and Study Skills Program, Allentown Middle School, Allentown, PA

When 6th and 7th grade students in the Allentown School District fail two or more subjects, they are required to enroll in a summer counseling and study skills program, as well as to make up the academic courses, in order to be promoted. The class focuses on study skills, attitudes and how to learn. Group and individual counseling is also provided. The program has been in operation for two years and reportedly has reduced subsequent retentions.

3. Remedial Program, Twin Valley School District, Elverson, PA

In the Twin Valley School District, 4th, 5th and 6th grade students who fail the regular courses in reading, language arts or arithmetic but are not recommended for retention must pass the remedial summer course or be retained.

4. Intensified Education Program, Titusville Junior High, Titusville, PA

In 1984-85, Titusville Junior High School began in intensified Education Program for students who have failed 7th or 8th grade two or more times. Students must be in the normal range of intelligence and must sign a contract to conform to student program regulations in order to be accepted into the program. They are confined to a self-contained classroom for all basic subjects, which are taught by teachers who have requested the assignment. The program is competency-based and focuses on projects and individualized instruction. At the end of six months, students who have a "C" average or better in all subjects are moved to the next grade. If they pass, they begin the following year in the next higher grade, thereby making up two grades in one academic year.

No special funding was required for the program, which served 21 students in its first year of operation. At the end of the first nine week marking period, these students were found to have much better grades and attendance than the year before and be causing far fewer discipline problems. In addition, an 18 year old student who had failed both 7th and 8th grade twice was able to move to the vocational school and was maintaining a "B" average.

5. Rebound Program, Tunkhannock Area Middle School, Tunkhannock, PA

Tunkhannock School District began an alternative learning program known as the Rebound Program in 1980. The program serves 7th and 8th grade students who are having difficulty in the regular classroom and need individual attention in their major subject areas. Students may also be assigned to the program instead of being retained.

Students remain in the program for a minimum of nine weeks. During this time they receive individual attention in a self-contained classroom staffed by one teacher. Class size is kept at 15 or fewer students.

Factors entering into the decision include reading achievement, math and language arts capabilities, physical, social and emotional maturity, family situation, learning rate and attendance.

Labaree sees the main benefits of a merit promotion policy as deriving from the intensified focus of all parts of the school community on achievement and from the enhanced remedial instruction programs. His suggestions for implementing a policy of raised promotional standards include:

1. A flexible promotional standard constructed from multiple measures.

2. A valid measure of achievement.

3. A rigorous evaluation program of effectiveness.

4. More than just basics. (More time may be required to help students deficient in basic skills, but this restriction of effort should not be pushed to the extreme which could produce a deficiency of interest and a deficiency of breadth and complexity in program.)

5. Include the average student--high achievement standards must be part of the program of minimum competency testing.

6. Emphasize instruction over retention--allocate resources to meet instructional needs.

7. Overall effectiveness of the school. (Consider Milwaukee's Project RISE--Rising to Individual Scholastic Excellence--as an example of a broad-based program for effective schools.)

Summary

What can be learned from a study of research and opinion literature on promotion/retention practices? Perhaps the only definite things are:

- Research results are unclear, conflicting and based on studies containing many procedural problems. Therefore, we can not say definitely whether promotion or retention results in higher academic achievement for each student.

- Opinion has varied, historically, according to the political currents of the day, but the present public and professional opinion leans toward merit promotion.

- It is best to make promotion/retention an individual matter for each child and to include a number of factors in the decision.

- If a district moves toward a merit promotion policy, it should do so with the provision that a different learning experience will take place for the retained student. A repetition of the same program in which the student was unsuccessful will not usually prove beneficial.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE FORMS

		Page
A.	Butler Area Elementary Schools Possible Retention Report	A-1
B.	Cornwall-Lebanon School District At-Risk Screening	A-3
C.	Scale of Critical Factors in Student Promotion/ Retention (Adapted)--School Unknown	A-5
D.	Jeannette Elementary Schools Retention Profile	A-7
E.	Promotion/Retention Guide and Follow-Up North Penn School District	A-9
F.	Guidelines for Determining Retention at Grade Level--School Unknown	A-15

The forms included in this appendix are copies or adaptations of those sent to the Department of Education by schools as part of their promotion/retention policy statements.

These examples show different ways to record and use information about a child in making an informed decision concerning retention or promotion. In some cases a second use is documentation for the school file.

Many additional forms and letters to cover parent conferences and notifications have not been included here. The PDE acknowledges with thanks the many good policies and forms received. The compilers hope you will find these forms of use in supplying ideas for the development of forms and procedures to fit your own school district.

A. BUTLER AREA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
Butler, Pennsylvania

Form E 251

POSSIBLE RETENTION REPORT

Pupil _____ Grade _____ School _____

Teacher _____ Date Report Began _____ Date Report Completed _____

Date of Birth _____ M.A. _____ I.Q. _____

Name of Test _____ Date Given _____

Age Entering School _____ Grades Repeated _____

Was Parent advised to: Enroll child in Junior First Grade _____

Child attended Junior First Grade _____

ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS

Grade 1

Test	Grade	Date						

Grade 2 - 3

Test	Grade	Date								

Grade 4 - 5 - 6

Test	Grade	Date										

Reading Test Results

Test	Rating

Academic Grades

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Reading						
English						
Spelling						
Mathematics						
Social Studies						
Science						
Science						

(OVER)

I. Attach report of psychological testing if one is available.

II. Give dates and results of contacts with parents (phone calls, school conferences, home visits, letters, etc.).

III. Other pertinent information (physical handicaps, emotional problems, home problems, other schools attended, child's attitude, etc.).

In view of the above data, I am of the opinion that the child in question should be:

	Teacher's Signature	Principal's Signature
Retained		
Promoted on Age		
Promoted		

B. CORNWALL-LEBANON SCHOOL DISTRICT

105 East Evergreen Road, Lebanon, PA 17042

AT-RISK SCREENING

Date _____
Year Month Day

Birthdate _____
Year Month Day

CA _____
Years Months

Year Entered in School _____

Name _____ Grade _____ Term 19 ___-19___ Building _____

Parent _____ Address _____ Telephone _____

A-3

Check column which best describes, in your opinion, the child's functioning.	LITTLE 1	2	MODERATE 3	4	MUCH 5
1. Is able to remain on tasks as well as age-mates.					
2. Controls impulses.					
3. Takes responsibility for independent tasks.					
4. Demonstrates age appropriate gross motor coordination.					
5. Demonstrates age appropriate fine motor coordination.					
6. Feels comfortable in new situations.					
7. Grooming and dress are age appropriate.					
8. Responds to emotional situations in acceptable fashion.					
9. Is liked by his classmates.					
10. Is relaxed and willing to take a risk.					
11. Responds appropriately to praise.					
12. Accepts corrections.					
13. Follows verbal directions.					
14. Can read and follow written directions.					
15. Verbally relates personal experiences in a logical fashion.					
16. Participates in subject-related discussions.					
17. Demonstrates understanding of age-appropriate concepts.					

(OVER)

AT-RISK SCREENING

1. What is this child's instructional level in math?

2. What is this child's instructional level in reading?

3. Physical characteristics. Examples: size, weaknesses, strengths, etc.

4. Number of days missed this year.

5. When did you first notice this child was experiencing difficulties?

6. What do you know about how this child learns?

A-4

7. What benefits would the child gain by repeating this grade?

8. What do you feel would be the parents' attitude toward retention?

9. General Comment:

Teacher _____

Date _____

C. SCALE OF CRITICAL FACTORS IN STUDENT PROMOTION/RETENTION

Based on

Lieberman's Decision-Making Model for In-Grade Retention

Name of Student_____ Birth Date_____ Present Grade_____

School_____ Teacher_____

Date_____

DIRECTIONS: Read each item and check those which apply to this student. Then count those items checked to arrive at a total.

1. PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

____ Student has a hearing loss

____ Student has a sight deficiency

____ Student possesses other physical abnormalities

2. PHYSICAL SIZE

____ Student is smaller than his peers

3. ACADEMIC POTENTIAL

____ Student shows a temporary slower rate of learning (Lacks readiness)

____ Student is an underachiever compared to the "average" student at his grade level

4. PSYCHOSOCIAL MATURITY

Student exhibits "babyish behaviors" such as:

____ Thumbsucking

____ Inability to take turns

____ Inability to attend for more than a few minutes

5. NEUROLOGICAL MATURITY

Student exhibits behaviors more normal in younger children, such as:

____ Poor gross motor development

____ Fine motor coordination difficulties, e.g., awkward use of pencil, scissors, etc.

____ Poor eye-hand coordination

____ Speech and language problems

____ Easily distracted

____ Inability to follow directions

____ Difficulty shifting from one activity to another easily

____ Difficulty remembering

____ Disorganization

6. STUDENT'S SELF-CONCEPT

____ Student exhibits low self-esteem as a result of low achievement

(OVER)

7. STUDENT'S ABILITY TO FUNCTION INDEPENDENTLY

Student requires constant supervision:

____ To maintain attention

____ To exhibit appropriate behavior

____ To be task-oriented

____ To perform the dictates of the task correctly

8. GRADE PLACEMENT

____ Student is enrolled in Grades K-2 and retention would be a valuable program option

9. CHRONOLOGICAL AGE

____ Student is younger than average or among the youngest in his class

10. PREVIOUS RETENTION

____ Student has not been retained previously

11. ATTENDANCE

____ Student has "fallen behind" due to excessive absences

12. GEOGRAPHICAL MOVES

____ Student has difficulty learning due to family transiency which resulted in the child's having to cope with a variety of methods, materials, goals, and objectives of different school systems.

13. FOREIGH LANGUAGE IMMIGRANTS

____ Student's learning problem results from living in a home where English is not spoken and consequently has limited exposure to American language and culture

14. BASIC SKILL COMPETENCIES

____ Student is inadequate or severely deficient in basic skill acquisition.

INTERPRETATION

The following table can be used to interpret the meaning of the total score. These "scores" are to be used only as guidelines. Do not view the sum as a standardized test score. The numbers were subjectively decided after careful study and consideration. (The "Total Score" is the number of items checked.)

TOTAL SCORE	INTERPRETATION
0-3	Poor Retention Candidate
4-9	Marginal Retention Candidate
10-15	Good Retention Candidate
16-30	Excellent Retention Candidate

D. JEANNETTE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

RETENTION PROFILE

STUDENT_____ GRADE_____ SCHOOL_____

AGE_____ BIRTHDATE_____ TEACHER(S)_____

ACADEMIC PROGRESS

REPORT CARD COMPOSITE GRADES

	LAST YEAR	PRESENT YEAR (To Date)
READING	_____	_____
MATH	_____	_____
LANGUAGE	_____	_____
SPELLING	_____	_____

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

(✓) program(s) child is currently in:

READING (ECIA I) _____ SPEECH _____

LEARNING DISABILITIES _____ VISION _____

ADAPTIVE PHYS. ED. _____ OTHER _____ (_____)

PREVIOUS HISTORY

Has student been previously retained?_____YES _____NO

If Yes, in what grade level/s_____: What school year_____

Has student been previously recommended for retention but not retained? _____YES _____NO

TESTING

Has student been previously tested by school psychologist? _____YES _____NO

Has student been submitted for psychological testing? _____YES _____NO

Should this child be considered for this type of testing? _____YES _____NO

(OVER)

TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

Specific Reasons For Recommending: (CIRCLE ONE)

RETENTION FAILURE PLACEMENT PROMOTION

_____

_____

_____

Attitional Comments Regarding Student:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

E. PROMOTION/RETENTION GUIDE
NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Student Name_____ Birth Date_____

Teacher_____ Grade_____

School_____ Date_____

There are four main areas to consider when the Child Study Team is discussing promotion/ retention. Teacher submitting child for consideration should complete I to IV of form.

I. PRESENT LEVEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN RELATION TO ESTIMATED ABILITY

A. Student is performing at the level expected according to estimated ability in reading.

consistently occasionally seldom

B. Student is performing at the level expected according to ability in writing skills.

consistently occasionally seldom

C. Student is performing at the level expected according to ability in math.

consistently occasionally seldom

D. Comments (including steps in remediation plan):

II. MOTIVATION AND ADAPTATION TO SCHOOL

A. Student completes work satisfactorily and on time.

consistently occasionally seldom

B. Student is attentive during instruction and conscientious in his/her studies.

consistently occasionally seldom

C. Student attends school and is on time.

consistently occasionally seldom

D. Student follows classroom and school rules and regulations.

ocnsistently occasionally seldom

E. Comments (including steps in remediation plan):

III. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS

A. Student associates with children his/her own age.

consistently occasionally seldom

B. Student exhibits a good self-concept.

consistently occasionally seldom

C. Student demonstrates a positive attitude toward his.her school environment.

consistently occasionally seldom

D. Student's performance and behavior indicates a good adjustment to class expectations.

consistently occasionally seldom

E. Comments (including steps in remediation plan):

IV. BACKGROUND

A. History of objective test data (achievement, intelligence, developmental, instructionsl reading and math levels).

B. History of Psychological and/Or I.U. Services.

C. Parent-School Participation

D. Previous School Experience (transiency, previous teacher concerns)

E. Family Concerns

F. Physical Aspects

V. FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The principal or his/her designee writes a final recommendation.
Summary/Reasons

Retention_____ Promotion_____

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS TO RECEIVING TEACHER

Include specific academic/social goals.

Principal's Signature_____ Date_____

Assigned to Teacher_____ Grade_____ for school year_____

Copies to: Receiving Teacher
Permanent Record

RETENTION FOLLOW-UP
NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Child's Name_____

DATE COMPLETED

By Mid-October:

Principal/Child Study Team review reasons for retention and recommendations with receiving teacher. _____

November:

Teacher meets with parent(s) to discuss progress of retainee. _____

By Mid-December:

Child Study Team meets to review progress of retainee. Progress of recommendations and strategies assessed. _____

Child Study Team develops plan of action if child is still experiencing difficulty. _____

Through March:

Teacher continues to monitor progress carefully. Child Study Team meets to update status of recommendations and strategies. _____

April:

Teachers hand-score achievement tests before sending to district office with all test response sheets. _____

By Mid-May:

Teacher completes follow-up document. Child Study Team meets to review follow-up data. _____

RETENTION FOLLOW-UP STUDY
NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Student Name _____ Birth Date _____

Teacher _____ Grade _____

School _____ Date _____

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	Circle most appropriate number				
Student is performing at the level expected according to ability in:	Consistently (1)				Seldom (5)
A. Reading Current reading level _____	1	2	3	4	5
B. Writing skills	1	2	3	4	5
C. Math Current math group _____ Number of groups at grade level _____	1	2	3	4	5

MOTIVATION AND ADAPTATION TO SCHOOL					
Student:					
A. Completes work satisfactorily and on time.	1	2	3	4	5
B. Is attentive during instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
C. Is conscientious in his/her studies.	1	2	3	4	5
D. Attends school and is on time.	1	2	3	4	5
E. Follows classroom/school rules and regulations.	1	2	3	4	5

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS					
Student:					
A. Associates with children his/her own age.	1	2	3	4	5
B. Exhibits a good self-concept.	1	2	3	4	5
C. Demonstrates a positive attitude toward his/her school environment.	1	2	3	4	5
D. Indicates a good adjustment to class expectations through performance and behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
E. Follows classroom rules and regulations.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMENTS

Child's Name_____

Recommendations for this child for this year are as follows. Please indicate the effectiveness of goals and strategies in achieving each goal for the child.

RECOMMENDATIONS/GOAL STATEMENTS	PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS
1.	1.

As you reflect upon the overal' performance and progress of this child during this school year, circle the number which shows the extent to which the retention was beneficial, in your judgment.

Maximally effective 1 2 3 4 5 Minimally effective

F. GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING RETENTION AT GRADE LEVEL

SCHOOL _____

DATE _____

STUDENT _____

TEACHER(S) _____

BIRTHDATE _____

PRESENT GRADE _____

O.N.D.J. (young) J.J.A.S. (average) F.M.A.M. (older)

1. Behavior	
2. Physical Maturity – Size	
3. Psycho-social Maturity	
4. Neurological Maturity	
5. Self Concept	
6. Ability to Function Independently	
7. Learning Readiness	
8. Absenteeism	
9. Academic Potential – Basic Skill Competencies	
10. Previous Retention	
11. Family Factors: Geographic Moves Language Problems Attitude Toward Retention Age and Pressure of Siblings Involvement of Family	
12. Other	

District not known.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

SOCIAL PROMOTION/RETENTION

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Building excellence into the schools of our nation has been the theme of many recent reports, articles and other publications. A summary by Spady of the Far West Laboratory and Marx of the American Association of School Administrators (Spady, 1984) places the number near 30. Spady and Marx note that between April and September of 1983, "no fewer that eight studies or reports of national significance reached the presses and the public, accompanied by dozens of similar documents with a more narrow state, regional or subject matter focus." Everyone seems to be advocating excellence in our schools, and one way to make this happen is to set high goals for learners and expect them to attain these goals.

Among the recommendations Spady (1984) and Marx have drawn from nine of the major reports is the recommendation that grades and promotions be based on academic achievement only. From Action for Excellence, the report of the ECS Task Force, comes the recommendation "that the practice of 'social' or chronological promotions be abolished; promotion from grade to grade should be based on mastery, not age." From A Nation at Risk they quote: "Grades should be indicators of academic achievement so they can be relied on as evidence of a student's readiness for further study. Student placement, promotion and graduation should be guided by students' academic progress and instructional needs, not by age." Sizer (1983) argues that mastery of a school subject must become more important than graduating ahead of time. "Until mastery of subject matter determines whether or not a diploma is granted, students will see minimal incentives for achieving such mastery." He concludes that "age-grading must cease, and students must be allowed to progress at their own rates."

As recently as June 1984, New York Times education writer Hechinger (1984) questioned the wisdom of the current move toward tougher standards for promotion. He quoted one of Goodlad's statements from A Place Called School which summarizes retention/promotion research: "Grade repetition rarely achieves its academic purposes, while frequently increasing the feelings of self-doubt." Despite such research findings, the move to the use of standardized tests or other rigid standards for promotion has continued. Ronald Edmonds (1982) described a New York City School Improvement Project which got underway in 1978 to elevate standards in schools, especially those in poor neighborhoods. He reported that they "changed the promotion policy to require that students not be promoted unless they demonstrate minimum academic mastery." However, in New York the tough promotion policy was accompanied by an alternative program for the failing students based on small classes with exemplary remediation programs and outstanding teachers.

Research Reviews

What does the research say about the value of retaining a student in the same grade? Can we find any guidelines which support either nonpromotion or "social" promotion?

Jackson (1975) reviewed the literature from the early twentieth century through June 1973, and most of the subsequent reviews have quoted the Jackson study. He found listings of 159 journal articles and books on the effects of grade retention, but was able to locate only 49 sources which reported original research. The 44 research studies reported in these 49 sources were intensively reviewed and categorized according to the type of analytical design used.

Jackson classified 30 studies which compared retained students with students promoted under normal school policies as Design Type I. The bias in this design is toward showing that promotion has more benefits than retention. In 208 analyses, two-fifths used grade-equivalent scores, and in these cases, because they do not use a constant metric, the bias is toward grade retention. A quarter of the analyses showed a statistically significant result favoring promoted pupils, and 41 percent showed a nonsignificant result favoring promotion. About 2 percent showed no difference, and just over 2 percent showed a statistically significant result favoring retention. The remaining 30 percent showed nonsignificant differences favoring the retained pupils.

Design Type II which compared the condition of retained students after retention with their condition prior to retention, was used in 11 studies. The results of 114 analyses supported the inherent bias in this design. Only four percent showed a loss for retained students or no difference; 86 percent showed a statistically significant gain, and almost 10 percent showed a nonsignificant gain.

Jackson pointed out the methodological flaws in these designs, but found only three studies which used his preferred Design Type III, pupils experimentally assigned to promotion or grade retention. These three studies had 40 analyses comparing the academic achievement of pupils retained or promoted in elementary grades. One anlaysis (2½%) showed a significant difference favoring promoted pupils, 17 analyses (42½%) showed a nonsignificant difference favoring promoted pupils, and 22 analyses (55%) showed a nonsignificant difference favoring retained pupils.

What can be learned from this study of studies? Jackson said, "The best justified conclusion that can be drawn from the 44 reviewed studies is the need for further research of a much higher quality then that conducted in the past." But this statement, while appropriate, is not helpful. Jackson does go on to draw one general conclusion.

> There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial then grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties.

> This is clearly indicated by the pattern of results from analyses using either of the two designs which investigated this comparison. . . . This conclusion should not be interpreted to mean that promotion is better than retention but, rather, that the accumulated research evidence is so poor that valid inferences cannot be drawn concerning the relative benefits of these two options.

Greaves (1975) reports the results of socially promoting 44 overage seventh grade students to ninth grade in high school at the end of the seventh grade. Three students transferred out of the district and one continued his poor attendance pattern and was placed on home teaching after one semester. Of the socially promoted group, in one high school 63 percent and in another 50 percent had average or better attendance; the group did not appear to place a greater strain on counselors' resources than the regularly promoted students; and their scholastic performance showed a solid C average despite 15 grades of F out of a total of 355 subject grades. The social promotion appears to have benefited most of these students, even in this unusual case where an entire grade level was skipped.

In reviewing essentially the same literature Jackson analyzed, Bocks (1977) concluded that nonpromotion brings no benefit to children and often brings harm. It cannot ensure greater achievement, but often worsens students social problems. Nonpromotion neither enhances student motivation nor decreases the range of student abilities with which teachers must cope. Bock argues that the answer is to adjust our teaching to meet student needs.

Finlayson (1977) responded to the same concerns expressed by Bocks, that social and personal problems could be increased by nonpromotion, in his two-year study of retention and self-concept. Contrary to his expectations, he found that among young children nonpromotion did not create self-concept problems.

Haddad (1979) looked at promotion/retention studies done internationally as well as within the United States. He concluded that despite the arguments in favor of grade repetition which assume that academic factors, as measured by achievement tests, determine success and failure, grade retention actually decreases achievement while promotion aids the total development of the child. Haddad also discusses the economic cost of grade repetition and the high correlation between grades repeated and dropout, i.e., leaving school before graduating.

Thompson (1980) is in essential agreement with earlier reviewers. "Those who vilify social promotion and call for strict grade promotion standards have not attended to research." The present accountability reaction, Thompson says, has little to do with educational quality and much to do with the political dynamics of society. "Some research suggests that retention can benefit immature students" in early grades; but when in doubt, promote. The best policy, according to Thompson, is to use social promotion as a rule and permit occasional retention when it appears to be in the child's best interest. In such cases, fully involve parents, teachers and specialists in the retention decision.

A Research Action Brief (ERIC 1981) carries the discussion a step further. The critical review of the research concludes that neither promotion nor retention really solves the problem of low-achieving students because both promoted and retained students continue to perform far below the class average. This review also briefly describes Lieberman's decision-making model for in-grade retention and Light's Retention Scale as possible guides for deciding who should be retained. Light's scale and Lieberman's model list similar child, family and school factors which should be considered in making the promotion/retention decision for each failing student; thus either one is valuable for stimulating thought about the multitude of factors to be weighed in the decision.

The Literature on Social Promotion Versus Retention (SEDL 1981) briefly reviews the history of social promotion policies, examines what research says about the benefits of social promotion and retention, especially as related to competency-based education, and describes some current strategies to solve the policy dilemma. This article also mentions the recent Indian River County, Florida, study reported by McAfee at the 1981 American Education Research Association Meeting. McAfee found that retention appeared to benefit students in the early elementary grades but not the middle-secondary grades. In all grades, however, compensatory education groups showed gains as large or larger than other groups.

The SEDL review emphasizes the need for new approaches. "Special approaches must be provided so that failing students will not simply be cycled through programs that did not work for them the first time and great care must be taken in selecting which students to retain, which to promote."

Graham (1982) investigated decision-making behaviors and attitudes of teachers and administrators in the District of Columbia toward two sets of guidelines for promotion and retention of elementary students. She concludes that both sets of guidelines led to different interpretations by different professionals because the guidelines were vague and unclear. Graham suggestions that clear policies and guidelines should be formulated which include suggestions from the teachers and administrators who are expected to implement such policies.

Kerzner (1982) investigated the effects of retention on 56 low-achieving elementary school students the year following their grade repetition. Using a standardized achievement test, students were tested at the end of their retained year as a pre-test and a year later as a post-test. Students in grades one, two and three made significant gains but gains for fourth and fifth graders were nonsignificant. Kerzner concluded that retention was beneficial, but this conclusion does not take into account factors of maturity or testing experience. There is no attempt to compare the benefits of retention with those of promotion.

Stiles (1983) reviewed literature on the history, pros and cons of grade retention, and on decision-making models for retention. She concluded that identification of students who would benefit from retention must be made on an individual basis. Factors associated with successful retentions include:

- Parental support for the retention
- Immaturity

- Normal intelligence
- Good social and emotional adjustment
- Average academic skills
- Academic achievement between 1.0 and 1.9 years below grade level and a progress rate less than half of normal (first grade, 0.3 years below level, second grade, 0.7 years below level.)

The earlier in a student's school career the retention occurs, the more effective it will be academically and the least damaging socially. The decision must involve teacher, parent, school personnel, and must be communicated appropriately to the student.

A meta-analysis of studies comparing matched pairs of retained and promoted students on achievement in reading, language arts, and arithmetic was made by Holmes (1983). His literature search and culling of 650 report titles revealed only eight studies of retained and promoted students who were matched on the basis of achievement test scores which contained sufficient data to calculate effect size. These eight studies were published between 1933 and 1967. Holmes concluded that the retained pupils, from time of retention on, scored lower than their promoted "partners" on achievement tests in reading, language arts and arithmetic. "It seems that retained pupils fall behind during the year they are retained and spend the rest of their academic careers in a vain attempt to catch up."

Rose and others (1983) examined the potential increases in numbers of students denied promotion in the current push for excellence. They found that most districts have maintained loopholes in their promotion/retention policies to allow for individual needs. Their summary of studies suggests that, on the average, promoted pupils make gains in school achievement of 8-12 months while retained pupils gain only about 6 months. "Experimental data collected over the past 70 years fail to indicate any significant benefits of grade retention for the majority of students with academic or adjustment problems." Rose discussed some placement alternatives to either repeating the grade with no modifications in program or social promotion under the same policy. If a student is to succeed, a special program will be needed in either the same grade or the next. Remediation, alternate instructional materials, partial promotion to a "half-step" grade, these are considered as possible aids to success for the low-achieving student.

Sanders (1984) also reports on the Rose and Medway research efforts in South Carolina. He notes their conclusions that only about one in three elementary students profit from retention. Younger students respond better than junior high students. Special remedial plans, a remedial IEP for each student, as well as parent concurrence with the decision to retain, can improve the chances that the retention will result in improved academic performance. Summer schools and testing for promotion during the school year are alternate ways to improve the good results from temporary non-promotion.

Summary

Is grade retention a useful practice? The research clearly indicates that simple retention in grade with no alteration of treatment, recycling the student through the same program and materials with the same teacher, is not the appropriate response to poor academic achievement. In special cases of very young and immature pupils, it can be helpful to give the child more time to grow, but even then the understanding and cooperation of the parents and special individual attention to and adjustment of each child's program is needed to achieve beneficial results. The retention/promotion decision must be carefully weighed and many related factors must be taken into consideration in order to provide the most productive decision for each child.

Alternative Practices

The Florida competency testing program was well advertised as one of the first full-scale accountability programs passed in 1976. Pinkney and Fisher (1978) reported the preliminary expectation that a quarter of the students were potential failures. They discussed the accompanying Florida Compensatory Education Act of 1976 to provide supplemental funds for providing remedial instruction to students who are below minimum competency levels. The real challenge is for schools to remediate effectively students who need remediation, and success in these efforts may improve the total quality of Florida's education.

Thompson (1979) discussed the national move toward merit promotion and graduation requirements, reflected in the recent Gallup poll of attitudes toward education by results showing that 68 percent favored examinations as a prerequisite for promotion. She noted new promotion and graduation practices and policies in Chicago, North Carolina, Denver, Maryland, and Virginia which are tying minimal standards to promotion. Chicago tests at ages 8, 11 and 13 to ensure minimal competency in basic skills before entry into high school at grade 9. Their policy assumes at least one extra year of remedial work for students who fail at any of these levels. They provide summer school, tutorial and remedial classes before allowing students to retake the test. Wake County, North Carolina left a loophole for middle school students who cannot meet their new promotional standards. Socially and physically mature students may be placed (not promoted) at a higher level than their test scores warrant, but must receive remedial help and later give evidence of making up the academic deficiencies before regular promotion to the following grade. Peer tutoring has been successful in Denver's high schools.

The Greenville (Virginia) County Schools' new strict promotion policy inspired both champions and opponents. Owen and Ranick (1977) reported that the schools attend to the diagnosis of students' individual strengths and weaknesses, provide intensive instruction to meet the needs of slower students, and create an atmosphere of success, even though no student is to be promoted until mastering the skills of each grade level. Retained students are grouped with other students of their age, and partial promotions are available for students who achieve most of the skills of their grade. These authors said achievement test scores and measured IQs have risen, the dropout rate and number of retentions have fallen, and students, teachers, and the community have responded with satisfaction.

Koons (1977) disagreed with these conclusions. He pointed out the research evidence that says promotion is better than retention for most students, and that Owen and Ranick are mistaken in assuming that low achievers who are promoted with their peers cannot be given work at a level at which they can succeed. He argued that the Greenville results may be due to the Hawthorne Effect, to more serious attention to test taking (or teachers teaching to the test), and to the possible effect of a strict promotion policy which can improve overall achievement in a district while decreasing that of low achievers. Koons does not dispute the methods of treating retained pupils in the Greenville system, but questions the practice of nonpromotion.

The SEDL (1981) review mentioned earlier also gave some additional information on practices in Greenville. After evaluation, slow or unwilling learners were assigned to schools either on the basis of age alone or achievement. They had fewer subjects (three per semester) and longer classes to improve their concentration, and they could be promoted one semester at a time. For students with low-academic ability or interest, a job training program which teaches job-related skills and gives instruction in basic skills was introduced.

The SEDL review also quoted from a 1973 Philadelphia report by Robert G. Reiter to present some strategies which may be helpful in solving the retention problem.

- Offer individualized education plans, individualized instruction, diagnostic and prescriptive teaching; all based on the idea of success in small tasks, building up to more difficult tasks.
- Establish close communication between school and home in order to communicate the idea that promotion and retention are not rewards and punishments but placements intended to maximize learning.
- Change the retained child's teacher, or make sure the same teacher doesn't appear to have lost faith or to be using unsuccessful strategies.
- Provide students with individualized instruction.
- Provide counseling to help pupils set realistic academic and career goals.
- Set up flexible scheduling to allow marginal students to take some subjects of interest and success to them.
- Abolish grades at the primary level, de-emphasize promotion.
- Group retained students with other over-age students.

In a review of elementary school promotion/retention literature, Bossing (1980) and Brien agree with most reviewers that retention does not ensure significant gains in achievement. They do cite studies, however, showing that teachers and parents appear to favor nonpromotion when necessary for immature children because it improves their school adjustment. Alternatives to nonpromotion such as half-step promotion, readiness or transitional maturity classes, non-graded programs, and individualized instruction are being implemented.

"When the decision not to promote a child is made, support from parents, teacher and principal is needed, the child should be assured that he or she has not failed, and the student should be provided a different teacher during the repeated year."

The PASS program in Richton Park, Illinois was described briefly by Borich (1983) as a program for getting capable students who are failing back on the track. The Positive Action to Scholastic Success program is a "system of mandatory extra-help sessions to compel students to face up to their poor study habits." This program is scheduled for the first 45 minutes at the end of the school day and takes precedence over all activities. No other school activity, not even athletics, is a legitimate excuse for absence from PASS sessions. Parents are notified when students are assigned to PASS, and they have strongly supported the program. Although extra paper work is involved for teachers, 28 of 31 teachers who assigned students to PASS found it to be a good program which reduced student failure drastically.

The Promotional Gates Program instituted in New York City in 1981 made educationally needy students the priority of the entire system. The program, as reported by Frank (1984), was a clear statement that all children were expected to learn. The program provided small classes, exemplary curricula, and specially trained teachers. Six-week summer programs were designed for students in danger of failing, and intensive staff development workshops were provided as summer programs for over 1,000 teachers. One of the second year modifications in the program was the initiation of special health and guidance support services. The program has resulted in achievement gains and in attendance improvement from 75 to 81 percent. School practices that lead to success in the program include instructional leadership from principals, effective teaching strategies, and a school climate of welcome and support amid high expectations for success.

In a recent report for the Citizens Committee on Public Education in Philadelphia, Labaree (1984) reviewed the literature and history of promotional policies in Philadelphia and the nation. After concluding that the research does not really support either social promotion or grade retention as an effective policy, Labaree analyzed the merit promotion policies in New York City, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Milwaukee as case studies of major cities with a form of merit promotion.

Of these five cities, New York has the most inflexible promotion standard, based on only the reading achievement test score, but also the most far-reaching remedial instruction program. In Baltimore both test scores and classroom grades enter into the promotion decision; but marginal cases are considered individually by a special school committee. Washington promotes on the basis of passing criterion-referenced tests of reading and math objectives, but those who fail to meet the standard of mastering 70 percent of the objectives in only one of these subjects are promoted into a transitional class focused on the deficient skill. Promotion in Chicago is dependent mainly upon mastery of 80 percent of the reading units for the grade level, but test scores and social and emotional growth are taken into account in the promotional decision. Finally, Milwaukee has defined conditions under which students may be considered for retention, but no set cut-off level at which they must be retained.

Factors entering into the decision include reading achievement, math and language arts capabilities, physical, social and emotional maturity, family situation, learning rate and attendance.

Labaree sees the main benefits of a merit promotion policy as deriving from the intensified focus of all parts of the school community on achievement and from the enhanced remedial instruction programs. His suggestions for implementing a policy of raised promotional standards include:

1. A flexible promotional standard constructed from multiple measures.

2. A valid measure of achievement.

3. A rigorous evaluation program of effectiveness.

4. More than just basics. (More time may be required to help students deficient in basic skills, but this restriction of effort should not be pushed to the extreme which could produce a deficiency of interest and a deficiency of breadth and complexity in program.)

5. Include the average student--high achievement standards must be part of the program of minimum competency testing.

6. Emphasize instruction over retention--allocate resources to meet instructional needs.

7. Overall effectiveness of the school. (Consider Milwaukee's Project RISE--Rising to Individual Scholastic Excellence--as an example of a broad-based program for effective schools.)

Summary

What can be learned from a study of research and opinion literature on promotion/retention practices? Perhaps the only definite things are:

- Research results are unclear, conflicting and based on studies containing many procedural problems. Therefore, we can not say definitely whether promotion or retention results in higher academic achievement for each student.

- Opinion has varied, historically, according to the political currents of the day, but the present public and professional opinion leans toward merit promotion.

- It is best to make promotion/retention an individual matter for each child and to include a number of factors in the decision.

- If a district moves toward a merit promotion policy, it should do so with the provision that a different learning experience will take place for the retained student. A repetition of the same program in which the student was unsuccessful will not usually prove beneficial.

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